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Developmentally Disabled: A Label, Not an Identity

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Poster Presentation PA

DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED: A LABEL, NOT AN IDENTITY

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"I have a friend I want you to meet. He loves sports. You should see his room. Michael Jordan posters up on all his walls and awards from all the events he's won cluttering his room. Yeah, he really hates to lose. He's a hard worker too. Everyone loves him, especially the ladies." Would you still want to meet him if instead of the above, I had said, "I have a friend I want you to meet. He's developmentally disabled." Both descriptions fit the subject of this photo-essay. Ryan is a sports fanatic, a hard worker, and a social butterfly. And Ryan is also developmentally disabled; he has mosaic Down syndrome. Yet the first description most likely made you want to meet him more than the second one. Why is this? "Developmentally disabled" is a label that constructs highly impenetrable barriers between the people under that label and everyone else. But the ones building the walls are not the ones enclosed in them. The bricks are laid by those who aren't developmentally disabled. This essay is an attempt to knock down those walls. To allow those on the outside entrance into the normally closed-off category of developmentally disabled so that a reconstruction of that category can be achieved, a reformation that recognizes the similarities between those under the label and those who are not. And it is also a challenge. Will you continue to bury people under labels? Or will you recognize that even "developmentally disabled" is a limiting description that can by no means encapsulate all of a person's identity? I have a friend I want you to meet. The question is, do you want to meet him?